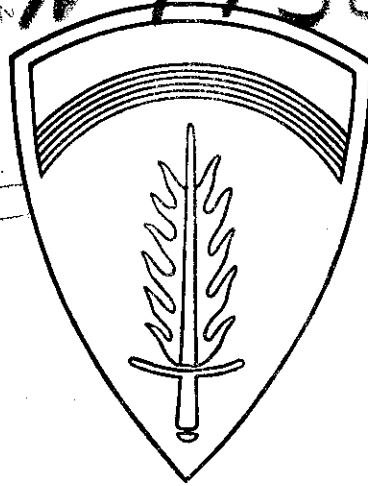


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SS Versus Wehrmacht (1933 - 45)

by

Groppe, Generalleutnant a.D.

Translator: J. J. Colombel

HISTORICAL DIVISION
HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES ARMY, EUROPE

Events as Experienced by an Old Soldier
during the NAZI Period, 1933-1945

During the years from 1930 to 1933, I was commanding officer of the fortifications near LOETZEN (EAST PRUSSIA) and in that capacity subordinate to the Commander of Defense Area 'I' - GENERAL von BLOMBERG, later FIELD MARSHALL and WAR MINISTER (or Secretary of State for War). In early spring of 1933 I was discharged from active duty with a pension and the rank of GENERAL-MAJOR, because my views on world affairs in general were not in accord with those acceptable for an officer of a future ARMY, created on the basis of a National Socialistic state, so I was informed by the office of GEN. von BLOMBERG through his Chief of Staff GEN. von REICHENAU (later FIELD-MARSHALL). No doubt, he was perfectly right about that. Nevertheless, several months later I was again summoned for active duty because it became evident that in view of the spasmodic and tremendous increase in the size of the ARMY they could not dispense altogether with the battle-seasoned officers of the old school. I accepted the appointment offered, which by the way, was not a very influential one, just because I was a soldier living on a pension. On the other hand, I realized that Nazism could only be fought effectively if one was on active duty having some sphere of action in an official capacity. From the very beginning I was sternly opposed to the National-Socialist movement, because I had not one

moment's doubt about the direction it would proceed in! Loving my country as a German and being a Catholic, I was oppressed with gloomy forebodings for the future of the German people, who were then suffering badly under the heavy shackles of the Treaty of Versailles, and under such circumstances would be inclined only too easily to fall a prey by listening to those enticing sounds and follow men who promised them a better future! Although under the skilled leadership of the Government by Reichskanzler BRUENING, there was a perceptible improvement, the bulk of the nation, particularly large numbers of unemployed workers, could not yet realize the fact and draw the consequences of a lost war.

My hostile attitude toward Nazism couldn't be kept hidden very long from party functionaries. The consequence of it was that I was censored by the Party, this in GLEIWITZ as well, where I was in garrison from October 1933 to November 1935, and also in KOSLIN, where I had been transferred subsequently; that finally caused the complaints against me made to WAR-MINISTER von BLOMBERG as early as 1935. Having these charges preferred against me, I was transferred in October 1936 to HANAU as Commanding Officer of trained Reserves in that area. The party-conditions in that town disclosed a very undesirable situation. District-Governor (Landrat) and Director of Police (Polizeidirector) and (PARTY) District-Leader (Gauleiter), all in one person, was LOESER, a sinister and morally most corrupt and questionable person. Soon I grew very unpopular because I limited my relations with the latter as well as to other party-functionaries.

only to absolutely necessary official business, avoiding strictly any social or private relations. I was blamed for this very much, of course, also for my refusal to salute with the so-called "GERMAN Salute" which was: "Heil HITLER."

My attitude regarding religion caused me to be called the "Black GENERAL" and also, but somewhat less courteously: "THE CATHOLIC DOG," "honorable" names I did not mind.

Conditions grew worse, when Loeser was replaced by ELSE as (PARTY) District-Leader, though the former retained his office as District-Governor and maintained his "benevolent" attitude toward me until my arrest on 10 August 1944. Else, a great favorite of GAULEITER SPRENGER, was morally of a still lower type, if this was possible, than Loeser and so was his Staff, composed correspondingly. The accuracy of my opinion might alone be proven by the fact that soon the NAZIS themselves could not get around it in sentencing Else to eight years prison with hard labor and the loss of all civil rights for 10 years, after his being convicted of most serious crimes in summer 1940. The leader of the HANAU-SS and still another local group leader of the PARTY in HANAU received the same punishment. A big part of the Staff of the Office of Districtleader went to prison. Else, who claimed in court for his exoneration that most of the military - and public - office holders and also a great number of the populace had been kissing his feet in byzantical submission (sorry this must be admitted), has never forgiven me for my blunt rejection of him!

In 1938 a major attack by the HANAUER-Nazi-functionaries was made against me under his sponsorship. On the strength of that report the Deputy Fuehrer (at that time) Rudolf HESS, made a report denouncing me to the MINISTRY OF WAR, reproaching me with my religious attitude as shown in a polling on church affairs, and in addition mentioning the fact that my three children did not perform any duty in the H.J. I reported in writing to the WAR-OFFICE, saying that in regard to my religious attitude and beliefs I would not take orders from anyone whoever he might be. Then I was informed that as of 1 October 1939, (which was the next legally admissible period of time for discharge) I was discharged from active service, because as was stated in the letter from Field MARSHALL KEITEL, and I quote, "in 1938 it was established that your attitude in question regarding a general view of life, is not in accord with such requirements as must be claimed from an officer of a National Socialist army." - end of quote.

The outbreak of the war prevented my discharge. The Party functionaries of HANAU persecuted me with their hate; on the other hand, I could establish the fact that many ordinary Party members behaved toward me in a really benevolent manner. This may be explained by the fact that most of the officials, medical doctors, lawyers, tradesmen, industrialists, workers, and farmers were forced simply to join the PARTY if they did not want to run the risk of not only suffering all kinds of severe economic injury but of being left without a job and becoming destitute!

An extraordinarily cunning propaganda system, which in itself had at its disposal all the most modern means, like radio, press, movie-shows and theaters, had to be considered by the average German; if he refused to join the Party, he would place himself completely in isolation and outside of the whole peoples' community. Associated with, and reinforcing these propaganda efforts, a devilish terror was maintained of which there is no previous example in all world history! If, during the course of time, the eyes of naive and unsuspecting people were gradually opened, it was, by then, too late to change horses! Secession from the PARTY was almost equal to a death sentence!

Such Party members, who wore the party emblem solely as a "safety-pin," holding together their economic security, displayed frequently - as I observed - a glowing hate against the Nazi system and I frequently had valuable support from many of them.

As previously mentioned, my discharge did not take effect because of the outbreak of the WAR. At that time, it was believed "they" were not able to dispense with the services of war-seasoned and experienced officers. I wore the insignia of the highest German war distinction, the order, "POUR LE MERITE," today rarely seen, with which I had been decorated for distinguished service in the World War I; this fact produced a frenzied rage in the NAZIS. Early in September 1939 I left, as C.O. in charge of the 214 INF.-DIV., for the front. The Division was recruited for the most part from nearby districts of FRANKFURT/MAIN, HANAU, GIESSEN, and

LOWER FRANCONIA and increased in size by men from this district; it was placed in commitment in the West-WALL between MERZIG and DILLINGEN. The majority of my men, mostly such of older age-groups, held strong religious beliefs which fact could be noticed by their numerous voluntary attendances at church service and also in their receiving the holy sacraments of the R. C. Church. Here again, persecution by the PARTY against my person could be observed, because I ordered preventive measures at once against attempts to sabotage divine service. The Chief of my military police detachment, a certain Lt. Lammerding, a former Ordensburg military student, opened up almost a regular office in order to collect data against me. A whole series of accusations were directed against me. For instance, they criticized me by saying that I protected the churches in areas not evacuated by the populace, against profane acts or desecration by the PARTY, that I had saved chalices, monstrances, crucifixes, and holy vestments, etc. of churches of evacuated places exposed to enemy artillery fire, and handed these articles over to the Bishop of TREVES; that I had facilitated the work of the clergy in seeing to the wants of civilians and carrying out their clerical duties, and that I had dared to call to account before a military court party functionaries who had rendered themselves liable to punishment and had shown the door to the Party district leader (Gauleiter), who wanted to interfere in a certain case in order to prevent me from bringing the guilty to court. Furthermore, that I opposed successfully suggestions of the District Governor

of TREVES for the establishment of bordellos (houses of prostitution) within my divisional district, and similar accusations, etc.

On December 1939 a weighty accusation against the spirit of Nazidom was booked against my record. The populace of places in the most advanced parts of the West-Wall zone had been evacuated already, before the outbreak of war. Further in the rear, where reserves and supply trains and communication columns were billeted, the populace had remained. In the afternoon of 12 December I received a report from a MAJOR KREHAN, local commander of one of these places, by telephone the party district leader had ordered the populace to a spontaneous demonstration against the jews for that night. Major Krehan reported he had told the local group leader that he would not tolerate such a demonstration! At once, I issued an order to the Division prohibiting excesses against the Jewish populace and ordering my men to prevent such, if necessary, by force of arms, and reported these measures to the GEN.-COMM-H.Q. because I had well-founded reasons, to fear that also in the other border districts jewish pogroms had been ordered. The Chief of Staff, in the absence of the Commanding General, brusquely refused to give orders for the protection of the jewish populace because in his opinion that was not in his province, and declared himself as compelled to report my incorrect attitude to Col. GEN von WITZLEBEN, Commanding General of the I Army. One hour later he called me up on the phone and reported somewhat dejectedly that Commanding GENERAL von WITZLEBEN was in full agreement with my measures and had issued an

order applicable for the whole area of the ARMY that excesses against Jews must be prevented by all means!

Of course, my attitude was reported immediately to the PARTY by spies, who could be found even among the officers of my own Staff and was promptly recorded against me as a crime.

On the whole, the entire "WEHRMACHT" was watched by spies of both sexes and every suspicious attitude of higher officers was at once reported to the PARTY or the GESTAPO. That was an easy way to put oneself in favor of the "Almighty PARTY" for a good promotion.

Even higher-up party authorities were mobilized against me. For instance, early in December 1939 District Leader WEINREICH of Hessen-Kassel reported to the Office for ARMY-PERSONNEL, that a certain Lt. CARTE, an officer of my division, had uttered derogatory remarks on the "Fuehrer" in October and I, being his superior court officer, had suppressed the case.

The Nazi-inclined Chief of the Office for ARMY-PERSONNEL, GENERAL KEITEL, (brother of the Fieldmarshall) handed on the accusation without further examination, by return mail to my office with the following comment added: "The Commanding Officer of the 214 INF. DIV. is hereby ordered to prepare court-martial proceedings against Lt. Carte and to report the steps that have been taken in the matter." Promptly, I could report: "The C.O. of the 214 INF. DIV. has already opened court-martial proceedings against Lt. Carte 6 weeks ago, and duly reported this in

accordance with ARMY regulations to the Office of ARMY-PERSONNEL promptly on the same day. This moral blow went home and General KETTEL (known in the ARMY as: LAKEITEL) never forgave me for this! By the way, Lt. Carte had found very lenient judges; he received a fine that could be payed in money.

Toward the end of 1939, an event occurred that drew upon me the glowing hate of Reichsfuehrer of SS HIMMLER which led to my dismissal from duty as C.O. of the 214 INF. DIV. On 11 December the following order from the SS was received here: - Reichsfuehrer of SS and Chief of GERMAN-POLICE IN THE REICHSMINISTRY of the INTERIOR.

BERLIN, 28 October 1939.

SS-Order for the entire -SS and the POLICE.

Every war entails the draining of much of the best of our blood. Many a victory by arms means for a nation an annihilating defeat simultaneously in the loss of its vital power and its lifeblood. The loss of the best of our younger men being a necessary consequence lamentable as it is, may not yet be the worst of all. Much worse is the resulting shortage of offspring not produced during the war by the living and the failure of others - falling on the field of battle - to leave any children behind. The old saying: Only he who has children can die in peace, must become a truth again in this war, especially so for the "Schutzstaffel" (-SS-). A man can die with peaceful mind knowing that his kinsfolk, and all they longed for and for which both he and his ancestors have striven, will be perpetuated

and realized through and by his children. The most precious gift to the widow of a soldier, who has died on the battlefield, is the child of the man whom she has loved!

Above and beyond the boundaries of civil laws which, under normal circumstances might perhaps be necessary, it may also be a high duty for German women and girls of pure blood to become the mothers of children of soldiers who are leaving home for the battlefield when only fate alone knows whether they will return home alive or to die for Germany in battle.

For the men and women too, who by the order of the State are to remain in the home front, there applies the holy obligation, in these times, to become once again fathers and mothers, and bear children.

Never shall we forget that victory of the sword and the spilling of the blood of our soldiers would be nothing but senseless sacrifice unless the victory of the child and the colonization of new lands were to follow!

In the previous war, many a soldier, conscious of a sense of responsibility, and furthermore, in order not to leave his wife with a still greater burden in case of his death if another baby should arrive, decided to refrain from producing more children during the war. These reflections and anxieties are now no longer to be considered by you men of the SS, because they were eliminated through the following rules:

- 1) For all legitimate and illegitimate children of pure blood the fathers of whom have died in the war, special sponsors appointed personally by the Reichsfuehrer of the -SS- will take over the

guardianship. We are standing in support of these mothers and shall, as far as humanly possible, take care of the education and the material worries entailed in the bringing up of these children until they become of age; consequently, no mother or widow will be exposed to want or distress.

- 2) For all children generated during the war - be they of legitimate or illegitimate birth - the "Schutzstaffel" will accept responsibility during the war in case of want or distress. After the war, when fathers have returned home, economic support will be given through the -SS- in a generous way, upon filing an individual application for additional help on reasonable grounds.

Men of the -SS- and future mothers of these hoped-for GERMAN children, show that all of you in the firm belief in the Fuehrer and with a will for the eternal life of our blood and our people, are willing to give all for Germany in order that it may live in the same spirit of bravery in which you are fighting now and are willing to die for.

(signed) H. HIMMLER

After having at once got into touch with my Commanding General with regard to the matter, and having gained the impression that he was not very likely to take very energetic steps for the enforcement of such a disgraceful order, I forwarded the -SS- order through official channels, as official business, direct to GEN. H. Q. Command. In my letter that accompanied the order copy I insinuated a possible falsification might be

involved here although I had proof in my hands bearing witness to the fact that the order was genuine. My insinuation, the order might be a fabrication, was made for the purpose of facilitating, in the case of GEN. H. Q. COMMAND the passing on of the order to the ARMY.

Copy ! (of accompanying letter):

THE COMMANDING OFFICER of the

H. Q. of the DIVISIONAL STAFF

214 INF. DIVISION

11 December 1939

- 1 - ENCLOSURE

H. Q. GENERAL - COMMAND XXX A.C.

Enclosed herewith please find an alleged -SS- order, the contents of which, by their sheer impudence, can hardly be surpassed and in which our women and daughters are practically degraded to the status of domestic animals for the -SS- and for the POLICE, as indicated in the third and last paragraph of the instrument.

Obviously, it would seem, it is a leaflet distributed by the enemy's information service which intends to create the impression in foreign countries, that the German people have parted with all standards of Western culture and civilization. If this alleged -SS-order circulates among our troops holding out in the front lines, it is to be feared that married men, out of fear for the fate of their beloved ones, wives, and daughters, may absent themselves without leave to go home and protect their own.

The order is distributed to men of the -SS- in fieldgrey uniforms.

(signed) GROPPE

The above report too went, as a matter of course, through the usual informatory channels to the PARTY, but became known to the B.B.C., peculiar as it may seem and without any contribution on my part, and soon thereafter London started broadcasting literal extracts from it.

End of December 1939 all HIGHER-COMMAND posts down to that of a division received the copy of a letter marked "confidential" which was addressed by the C.O. of the ARMY-HIGH-COMMAND, - at that time Col. GEN. von BRAUCHTICH, - and dated as of 21 December 1939, to the CHIEF of the HIGH-COMMAND of the ARMED FORCES Col. GEN. KEITEL, with regard to that particular HIMMLER order; it read as follows, and I quote:

"The edict signifies an infringement of the greatest and until now intact moral laws of mankind, which laws are affirmed and recognized by the greater part of our people. It is in contradiction to the education given to our ARMY, which aims to elevate the young recruits to high morals and self-control and to show a respectful attitude toward the German mother (wife) and the family. It may lead to great conflict in the theater of operations with the civilian populace where our troops are living so close together in a narrow space. It is too obvious, the youthful soldiers of the ARMY may think that they also should have a duty and an equal right allowed in their case, as handed down in the order to the -SS- and the POLICE.

Undoubtedly, large sections of the populace will reject the idea of unlimited sexual intercourse, which would be the result of carrying out in practice such an edict and naturally they would look for help in the matter from the superior German military authorities! Those soldiers, who, in particular were facing the enemy in the front line, would fear that their daughters, sisters, fiancées, or even their wives would not remain unmolested as a consequence of this edict! It will lead to anxiety and jealousy and might produce serious family troubles which now are even less desirable than at any other time." - end of quote.

These were fine words with which the Commander in Chief of the ARMY (Col. GEN von BRAUCHITZ) lashed this shameless order to the -SS-, but no deeds followed them! The Chief of the HIGH-COMMAND of the ARMED FORCES, Col. GEN. KEITEL, to whom the letter was addressed, was the worthy brother of the afore-mentioned brother of the Chief of the Office for ARMY-PERSONNEL, and was known in the ARMY by the nickname "the inflated lion." Neither of these brothers had any scruples at being panderers to the Party and watched like a hawk the decent-minded but rather weak - so far as moral courage went - character, GENERAL von BRAUCHITZ; they sabotaged every attempt that was made to counter the criminal intentions of the NAZIS.

That was the reason that nothing happened after the warning letter of appeal written by Col. GEN. von BRAUCHITZ. On the contrary, the language of the Nazis grew even more bold. In the official press of the -SS- the publication "Das Schwarze Korps," edition dated 4 Jan 1940, a

conspicuous comment on the HIMMLER order was printed containing the following threat: "A girl who might try to shirk this - her high moral duty - one way or another (here we have in mind the one other old way that has not yet been eradicated) is as guilty as a deserter and in no way different from a man who refuses to serve under the colors."

The last mentioned category was punished with the death penalty as is well known. This official comment left no doubt about what a girl was to expect, if she was bent upon saving her honor!

In a conference of commanding officers on 4 January I read the comment, which had been pressed into my hands and uttered the following remarks with regard to it: "Gentlemen, they told us on New Years Day that the year 1940 would bring a decision between us (Germany) and ENGLAND. It seems to me that, with reference to what I have just read to you, a decision will have to come between our Lord and the Devil." As a matter of course, these remarks of mine were reported to the PARTY immediately by spies. The HIMMLER order naturally struck the troops like a bombshell and created a deep unrest in the minds of my soldiers. During my daily inspection round of the front I was continually approached with questions by my men, who betrayed their anxiety about their wives and daughters with reference to the edict. I utilized an opportunity which presented itself on 6 January during an inspection of a bombardment school in the rear, to talk to representatives of all kinds of units of my division on the -SS- order. Here I spoke to them in the approximately the following terms:

"Tomorrow, when you men return to your regiments again after having been on leave for a four week period, you will notice a deep excitement has come over your comrades because of an order issued by Reichsfuehrer HIMMLER according to which our womenfolk and girls are ordered to permit sexual intercourse with -SS-men and POLICE in order to bear children out of wedlock. It is an outrage that such an order is possible in the organization of a Christian state. But tell all of your comrades that the honor of their wives and daughters is as sacred to me as the honor of my own wife and daughter and that I shall protect their honor."

Naturally, the tenor of my talk was transmitted immediately to HITLER.

On 19 January, I received an order to report in BERLIN on 21 January with Col. GEN. von BRAUCHITZ. Before I started on the trip I was told to report first to H.Q. of ARMY-GROUP-I in FRANKFURT/MAIN. There, in the absence of FIELDMARSHALL von LEEB I was informed by his Chief of Staff GEN. von SODENSTERN that HIMMLER intended to take steps against me on the grounds of a statute defining "malicious intent." Col. GEN von WITZLEBEN (later executed by hanging after the 20 July 1944 affair), who was my superior officer, had reported to the ARMY-GROUP in writing that he was in support of my attitude and that he (von WITZLEBEN) would resign his position as Chief C.O. of the I Army if I was censured for the incident and he had requested FIELDMARSHAL von LEEB to extend to me his benevolence and protection. The latter had expressed his thanks to the Col. GENERAL for his communication and in turn had replied that he too was in support

of my attitude and would also resign his position if I was brought into court on the matter.

Simultaneously, GEN. von SODENSTERN delivered to me a letter written by FIELDMARSHALL von LEEB to Col. GEN. von BRAUCHNITZ with instructions to present it to the latter. The contents of that letter was read to me and ran in its closing sentence as follows, - I quote: -

"I place myself solidly behind GEN. LEUTH. GROPPE with the full influence of my reputation even if, in the heat of the just indignation aroused by a perusal of the Reichsfuehrer's order to the -SS-, he used the wrong words to express his feelings." - end of quote.

The energetic support of both of these generals, noblemen in the best sense of the term, saved me from the worst.

Hitler and his accomplices could not, at that time, afford to treat FIELDMARSHALLS like students. They were still needed. A pity that only so little "public courage" was prevalent among our generals; egotism was with many of them a stronger force and placed above the well-being of the whole people. If only we had had more men with characters of von LEEB and von WITZLEBEN, then the prospect would have been much brighter for all of our people!

Arriving in BERLIN, I first paid a visit to the Chief of the Office for ARMY-PERSONNEL, GEN. KEITEL. Here I could establish the fact that the latter had already taken sides against me on HIMMLER's complaint without giving me too a chance to be heard on the matter. (Please, compare

the case of Lt. CARTE, previously mentioned) And by reproaching him, as I did, in the most scathing terms, with bowing the knee before every party bonzo while at the same time having nothing but kicks for elderly generals, I aroused anew his enmity against me - a feeling shared by his brother, the FIELDMARSHALL. It was interesting to me to hear through my conversation with GEN. KETTEL that the HITLER order, advocating free love, was expressly confirmed by HITLER and had created no resentment in only two armies; those were the ARMIES of Col. GEN. DOLLMANN and Col. GEN. von REICHENAU, both of whom were known to be strong Nazi supporters.

The results of my interview with Col. GEN. von BRAUCHITZ, lasting about two hours, seemed to be satisfactory in every respect. I reported minutely on the morally subversive propaganda in the armed forces by the PARTY and found him in full agreement with my attitude. So I was all the more surprised when, on 31 January 1940 I was informed by teleprinter of my discharge from my position as Commander of the Division and transferred to the Reserve of the O.K.H. with residence at MANAU. Shortly thereafter I received a letter from the Office of the Chief Commanding Officer of the ARMY, which ran as follows:

Copy

BERLIN, 6 Feb. 1940

Office of the Chief Commanding Officer of the ARMY,
written by an officer
to: Lt.Gen. GROPPE,

In conversations with officers and in addresses directed to non-commissioned officers and men representing different units of the 214. INF.-DIV. you have made statements with reference to the order for the preservation of GERMAN blood, issued by Reichsfuehrer of the -SS-. You have reported to my office orally and in writing, claiming that with these talks and conversations you wanted to influence the men of your Division by producing an enlightening and quietening effect. From a perusal of the material before me it is evident that you have chosen a form which is in no way appropriate to exert a quietening and tranquillising effect on the minds of the men!

Over and above that, you have chosen to give an interpretation of the edict of Reichsfuehrer of the -SS- and Chief of GERMAN POLICE which, whether willingly or unwillingly, must not be imputed to a leading personality of the GERMAN RACE, he being conscious of his responsibility. In doing so, you have censured severely the Reichsfuehrer of the -SS- and Chief of GERMAN-POLICE; in dealing with such questions you have shown a lack of discretion in a military as well as in a political sense, qualities that must be expected from an officer commanding a division.

Because of these findings I am compelled to dispense with your services in your present position expressing at the same time my severe disapproval.

In consideration of your previous meritorious service in war and in peace, I shall not consider sending your name up to the FUERHER for a dishonorable discharge from the WEHRMACHT. But I must expect that in the future you will observe greater restraint in airing your opinions on world

affairs or on political matters.

(signed) von BRAUCHITZ

It was obvious, Col. GENERAL von BRAUCHITZ, who personally had always received me with every sign of benevolence, could not put through his own ideas, when confronted with those of HITLER and HIMMLER in my case. It is interesting to compare the third paragraph of the above letter with a previously mentioned one of the Col. GENERAL to the Chief of the HIGH-COMMAND of the ARMED-FORCES, dated 21 Dec 1939. It reminds me of a quotation from "Wallenstein" by Friedrich von SCHILLER: -

"Daring was the word, because the deed was not."

GEN. FIELDMARSHALL von LEEB had traveled to BERLIN on special purpose to be of help to me in my case. Not only did he succeed in arranging that I should still remain on active service and no court-martial proceedings be started against me, but he also succeeded in compelling HIMMLER to apologize because of his propagation-order in issuing an edict dated 30 January 1940, copies of which were distributed to every company of the ARMY.

Even if this apologetically phrased edict was rather evasive, skating round the real core of the matter at issue, nevertheless it signified a humiliation which he never forgot and later turned out to be the main reason for my long imprisonment.

Another excuse was offered him for his hate when I appeared as a witness in court proceedings at STOLP, 16 May 1941, a detailed broadcast

of which was given by the B.B.C. in later part of May 1941.

The source of information on these proceedings for the B.B.C. remained a mystery.

The accused in the case, a certain EBERHARD von BRAUNSCHWEIG, owner and manager of a baronial estate at LUEBZOW was placed on trial before a special court at STOLP, accused of alleged high treason. It was a matter of life or death for the accused, but my statements in court as a witness for the defense were such that he got off with a two-year jail term.

Since I was well acquainted with the mean tricks of the PARTY I approached the senior officer of the STOLP garrison GEN.-MAJOR von GERMER with a request to attend the court hearing and to make notes of my testimony. The same request I directed to the official representative at DEFENSE AREA II. Both of these gentlemen, the latter a lawyer, made spontaneous declarations after the trial, by saying that my statements in court as a witness has been indisputably blameless. The two gentlemen reported the following day to GEN. of ART., FOEHRENBACH, C.O. in the same strain.

Four months later, on 23 September 1941, Lt. GEN. FETT from FRANKFURT/MAIN presented to me an order from the Office for ARMY-PERSONNEL, signed by my "friend" KEITEL, on behalf of the Deputy-C.O. of the GEN. COMMAND IX A.C., to whom I was subordinate, to resign my position in the ARMY by 1 October 1941.

The order, dated 19 September 1941, read in part as follows, and I quote: - "This measure is in connection with your attitude as a witness in criminal proceedings against the landowner-farmer von BRAUNSCHWEIG before a special session of the County Court at STOLF. Your attitude will still be subject to a special investigation the results of which will determine the kind of discharge you will be given from the ARMY. Already at this time, the CIC of the ARMY sees it established that Lt. GEN. GROPPE lacks the qualities of restraint in the province of political matters and consequently has not lived up to expectations as required of him and expressed in our communication dated as of 6 February 1940 requiring him to do so. The question of wearing his former uniform is reserved, pending a later decision."

(signed) KEITEL

I am firmly convinced that it was not Col. GEN. von BRAUCHTICH but GEN. MAJOR KEITEL who was the party who established, before any investigation was conducted, that I was lacking the required qualities of restraint in political matters, and he used Col. GEN. von BRAUCHTICH's name in an attempt to make mischief!

Because of my refusal to resign from the ARMY and my demand for an investigation and a regular hearing before a court of honor, Lt. GEN. FETT then started a hearing on the contents of the letter of complaint from the Chief of the (NAZI-) PARTY's OFFICE, MARTIN BORMANN, dated 14 September 1941, in which the latter made the silliest accusations against me about

my attitude as a witness before the special court in STOLP. These reached their greatest height with the assertion that with my testimony and my attitude I had, and I quote: - "attempted to expose the N.S.D.A.P. and its dutiful members to ridicule and make it the laughingstock of the public." The complaint closed with a statement pointing out the numerous sins I had allegedly committed in the HIMMLER case and affirmed that, having thereby placed myself outside of the peoples' community I should also be looked upon in that sense!

Lt. GEN. FETT, who was conducting the investigation along with Col. GEN. of INF. SCHNIEWINDT, as well as the C.O. of the II A.C., GEN. of ART. FOEHRENBACH and GEN. von GERMAR, all of these being requested to take sides in the matter nevertheless declared that my attitude was an absolutely blameless one and in no way objectionable.

In spite of this I was informed by letter from GEN. KEITEL's office, dated 16 December 1941, of my discharge from the ARMY, this to take effect on 31 December 1941, with the absurd remark, the measure had no connection with the STOLP affair. The latter matter was still pending.

My superior C.O. (GEN. SCHNIEWINDT) immediately put in a protest against my illegal discharge, but naturally without success. I left active military service on 31 December 1941, but still entitled to wear my uniform as a General. Since I failed to hear anything more of the STOLP affair I wrote to the OFFICE for ARMY-PERSONNEL the following application, putting it through official channels by way of Deputy-C.O. of H.Q. Command of IX A.C., dated as of 16 March 1942:

Copy

HANAU, 16 March 1942

To DEPUTY-GENERAL H.Q. COMMAND IX A.C.

On 23 September 1941 I was made acquainted with the contents of a letter, written by the Chief of the Office of the PARTY (BORMANN), in which serious accusations were made against me in connection with my appearance as a witness before a special court in STOLF, 16 May 1941, which accusations culminated in the declaration that I had placed myself "outside of the peoples' community" on account of my attitude before said court.

When I was examined on the matter by Lt. GENERAL FETT I indicated to him, all of the accusations against me were entirely baseless and in order to prove this I named several witnesses.

On 25 October 1941 I received a communication from the Office of the Deputy-GENERAL H.Q. COMMAND IX A.C. saying that the HIGH-COMMAND of the ARMY had taken steps for a hearing of the generals named as witnesses and had requested the file on the case.

By a letter No. 10527/41, dated 16 December 1941, from the Chief of the OFFICE for ARMY-PERSONNEL, the latter confirmed this to me, saying that investigation proceedings were in progress and that I would be informed on the outcome of them.

By now three months have passed without my having received any further communication on the case.

Since June 1938 on three different occasions entirely baseless and untrue accusations have been made against my person by high and even the highest PARTY-functionaries to the OFFICE for ARMY-PERSONNEL. On the first two counts none of the involved party-authorities have ever taken the trouble to excuse themselves after the injustice of their complaints had been proved. They remained just silent and I have reason to fear that this time the matter will take a similar course.

Consequently, I make the request herewith to the GEN H.Q. Command kindly to approach higher authorities with a view to starting exoneration proceedings, particularly since the statements of the Generals have already been on record for five months.

I am now in my sixtieth year and the witnesses, named by me, in several instances still older men and exposed daily to the danger of a soldier's life. For the protection of my honor, which is also that of the officer corps, I request that this investigation be brought to a final conclusion.

(signed) GROPPE, Lt.GEN a.D.

According to a communication of the Deputy-GENERAL H.Q. Command IX ARMY, my application was presented on 19 March to the HIGH COMMANDS of the ARMED FORCES. The latter persisted in its previous silence. On 26 April 1942 the GERMAN Reichstag convened where the last remnants of justice and law in the THIRD-Reich were thrown overboard and HITLER was proclaimed sole and autocratic judge. I realized at once what this change meant for

me! And indeed, on 13 May 1942 I received the following letter, the contents of which showed plainly the common hate of HITLER, and the two KEITEL brothers:

Gerny

Headquarters

HIGH COMMAND OF THE ARMED FORCES

3 May 1942

No. 147/V/42/ PA-2(Ia)

To Lt. GEN A.D. GROPPE, HANAU

Supplementary to the letter dated 16 December 1941 from the Chief of the Office for ARMY-PERSONNEL and likewise in answer to yours, dated 16 March 1942, addressed to the Deputy-GEN. HIGH-COMMAND of IX A.C., you are hereby informed that:

It has been established ever since 1938 that your attitude regarding questions on world views is not in conformity with requirements as expected from an officer of a National-Socialist ARMY; FIELD-MARSHAL von BRAUCHITZ also expressed this to you in his letter of 6 February 1940. Regardless of this warning, not only your connection with former von BRAUNSCHWEIG, whose hostile attitude toward our present state-form is universally known, but also your emphatic taking sides for him during criminal proceedings against the aforementioned before a special court of justice.

Minutely conducted investigations and hearings of interested parties have established that your attitude and your testimony

as a witness in that trial are not compatible with the conception of an ARMY officer living in a National-Socialist state. In displaying such an attitude, you have drawn a line of separation between yourself and the officer corps.

An investigation by a court of honor, as requested by you, is declined because the facts are already sufficiently clear!

The FUEHRER and Supreme Commander of the ARMED FORCES, at a conference of military leaders, has censored your attitude most severely and decreed as follows: that.

- 1) Your discharge from active military service, granting, however, permission to wear the uniform of a Lt. GEN. of the ARMY, effective as of 31 December 1941, is herewith cancelled.
- 2) Herewith you are dismissed from active military service, as of 31 December 1941 without permission to continue wearing your uniform.

Your capacity as a superior-ranking officer and your right to bear the title, hitherto accorded you, of General Leutnant a.D., are no longer recognized.

(signed) KEITEL,

GENERAL-FELDMARSHAL

At the same time I was informed that in consideration of a resolution passed during a session of the Reichstag on 26 April 1942, the above decision was final and no appeal possible.

Through the aforementioned decree I was practically outlawed and exposed to every trickery. I did not have to wait for very long. In August 1942 I was summoned by the GESTAPO for a hearing with reference to a letter I had written to a young soldier on the war front, and which had been opened. They seemed to look with suspicion upon my expression in that letter "our beloved Fuehrer" - which I had underlined (not without reason) and it appeared ironical to them as an attempt to exert a disintegrating influence on the "WEHRMACHT."

On 1 October 1943, in accordance with the laws for universal employment I was assigned for work to the HANAUER - PLATINUM - METLING - PLANT. Here I was to take care of matters pertaining to the protection of the plant from air attacks, which service I fulfilled as honorary air warden without pay. Even in this huge plant I was surrounded and watched by spies; numerous complaints directed against me for alleged utterances of defeatism were made to the general manager Dr. W. H. HERAEUS and the foreman SCHMIDT, but these two men paid little attention to such denouncings. One informer, however, reported to the GESTAPO direct and I was summoned there for interrogation. But neither the disintegration of the "WEHRMACHT" nor my "defeated utterances" had any visible effect at that time; these matters were "put in the icebox" for a later date.

The attempt at assassination of HITLER, 20 July 1944, provided the tyrannical Nazis with desired pretexts to dispose of all of their disliked elements. Early on 21 July 1944 I too was arrested and brought to

WIESBADEN before -SS- Obergruppenfuehrer SOMANN for a hearing. After a short interrogation I was again released.....

On 4 August 1944 I was summoned to appear before the Reichskriegsgericht (Reichs Court Martial) at TORGAU, Judge-GENERAL HOFMANN. He informed me that investigations were being conducted on the above-mentioned two cases: 1) for disintegration of the WEHRMACHT and 2) for defeatist utterances, which had been reported to the GESTAPO. These two cases and the reasons for my dismissal from active service and also the STOLP incident would be the subject of a thorough investigation. My dislike of the Nazis and noncompliance with the order to use the GERMAN salute, were also held against me and reinforced by pointing out that FIELD-MARSHAL KEITEL had written a most unfavorable report about me. The latter, it was clear, had again expressed his "benevolent" interest in my person.

In fairness to the Judge-General I must say that he obviously felt very unhappy about me in his capacity as investigating magistrate. These proceedings had been forced upon him by the two KEITEL brothers, but I had the impression he was fully aware of the absurdity of the situation. He dismissed me, speaking in a friendly manner with a promise to check on my whole military record to find out all exonerating circumstances in my defense.

But there was another one who had not forgotten: HIMMLER. On 10 August 1944 I was arrested in HANAU by the GESTAPO by a direct order of HIMMLER and taken to DARMSTADT prison the same day. There I was searched

and anything I carried in my pockets, including my wristwatch, was taken away from me. Police Sergeant WIEGAND, a good-natured man, overlooked a volume of the New Testament on purpose. During my detention there, lasting 24 weeks, that man always showed a decent and benevolent attitude toward me and all the other political prisoners. I must say the same of two other police sergeants (prison guards) JAEHRLING and MITZE. JAEHRLING took pains to pass letters and other communications between the prisoners and their relatives and in so doing exposed himself to great personal hazards. MITZE, in a cheerful and self-sacrificing manner was responsible for saving our lives, during a severe air attack upon the City of DARMSTADT in the night of 11 September 1944. Hated all round was Police Sergeant (prison guard) REINING who treated the foreign prison-inmates in a really brutal and beastly way!

The GESTAPO prison held in the average about 500-600 prisoners, among them, besides the Germans, were Frenchmen, Belgians, Luxemburgers, Russians and Poles. Since prison space was inadequate, the prisoners frequently were crowded together in an inhuman way. One poor Russian, arriving at the prison more dead than alive, was lying around in an alleyway day and night covered with his own excreta! One day he was missing. It was said they had shot him.

Two or three other prisoners, they said, had also been shot.

Among the German prisoners were three former deputies, two former members of the Hessian Diet a Mr. GAIM, and Mr. WESP and one Dr. BOCKIUS,

a former member of the German Reichstag. One day, the latter was taken to a concentration camp and, as I read in the paper recently, had been murdered there. There was a continual coming and going among the prison population. Those that were transferred, turned up later in some concentration camp; among them were two Catholic priests of LUXEMBURG nationality.

I enjoyed the "privilege" of occupying a single cell by myself, which was cleaned by Russian prisoners. Agreeable as it may seem in many respects, not having to share a cell with some other prisoners, the loneliness was almost killing. Since my watch had been taken away from me too, I had no means of checking the time and passed the days without being able to count the hours. Gradually I learned to determine the approximate time by the altitude of the sun and from different recurring noises within the prison. The frequent air alarms were a real blessing. Then we were conducted into the cellar - vaults, where one could communicate in whispers with other fellow-prisoners. At night, of course, this was not a change to be relished when the mass of Russian and Polish prison inmates, who would otherwise be working outside of the institution during daytime, were overcrowding the premises; space was then limited so much, we had to stand up closely pressed together. A consequence of these meetings was the considerable spread of lice all over the place. The beasts bothered me a great deal but I took it as something like a substitute for this year's lost hunting season.

At first, the food supply was adequate, but after the air attack in

the night of 11 September 1944, which resulted in the destruction of the City of DARMSTADT, it was really pitiful. Spiritual attendance by a member of the clergy (horribile dictu !) was of course not available in a GESTAPO prison. Already in 1937 or 1938 HITLER expressed himself during a visit to the Ordensburg "VOGELSANG" as follows, and I quote: "I shall crush Christianity with my boot like a poisonous toad"; end of quote.

That difficulty was partly mastered too in spite of all snags; how it was done must yet remain my secret. The R.C. Church had had experience ever since the days of the catacombs.

15 August 1944 I was taken before GESTAPO Inspector WANGEMANN, for interrogation. He said to me that he could not disclose the reason for my arrest but hinted by innuendo, my religious attitude was a factor in the case. WANGEMANN said the FUEHRER had ordered that questions on world views should take a rest during the WAR, but after the WAR ?

When I told him I had already been summoned for a hearing and interrogated at TORGAU, he called up the main-office of the Reichssicherheits-Amt in BERLIN and, having received information, abruptly terminated the interrogation that had just started. On the same night a prison inmate, who was employed in work at the telephone switchboard, told me the main-office of the Reichssicherheits-Amt in BERLIN had sent a teletyped message as follows: - "Investigation against GEN. GROPPE to be discontinued since no counts of indictment are at hand." - And the Reichskriegsgericht (Reichs-Court-Martial) at TORGAU had wired that "the investigation proceedings against me held out no promise for my success."

I am not in a position to confirm the truth of these statements by this prison inmate, who also claimed to have overheard an orally made utterance of a GESTAPO official to the following effect: "We are going to let this Catholic dog stay in jail further for awhile."

Indeed, the HIGH-COMMAND of the ARMED-FORCES (O.K.W.) had figured with my transfer to the detention fortress of GERMERSHEIM, as can be shown later, but HIMMLER had given orders that I was to stay in the DARMSTADT prison because a disappearance for good could be more easily arranged from there. Later events, crowding fast on each other, and aspirations toward a certain amount of "re-insurance" may have caused the GESTAPO-inspector to issue orders for my transfer in the middle of January 1945 to the detention fortress of KUESTRIN, to which place the former inmates of GERMERSHEIM had been transferred meanwhile.

For that reason, cell number 18 was to be my living quarters for another five months.

During all that period I was permitted outside to breathe fresh air for altogether only six hours. In spite of this, my health remained quite satisfactory.

During the course of this long stay, my condition gradually got better thanks to the sacrificing and ever cautious attitude of my courageous wife. After a period of only two weeks she succeeded in being permitted to pay me weekly visits of from ten to twenty minutes. She brought me clean laundry, foodstuffs, smoking material and even wine and coffee, and books

too, explaining to the prison guards in a clever way that these privileges were granted by higher authority. But indeed, never had any such permission been given; but by and by the guards grew accustomed to it and seemed to believe it themselves. They were simple-minded, good natured men who had gotten their position by reason of the Emergency Service Law.

The distance from HANAU to DARMSTADT is about 50 kms, and every week, my wife, accompanied by our youngest son, a boy of 17 years, traveled this distance burdened down with heavy packages. Because of the bad military reputation of his father they had abstained from drafting (fortunately!) the boy into the services. Frequently the railroad connection was interrupted, which then entailed negotiating a large part of the 100 km-distance by walking. Frequently my wife and the boy needed fifteen hours to make the trip, when air attacks compelled them to take cover. But they always reached their destination in spite of all hardship and hazards.

In the night of 11 September 1944 the City of DARMSTADT was almost completely destroyed by an R.A.F. attack. But the prison establishment was spared as through some marvel. They asserted the British fliers had marked the region in the air above the prison institution with light signals.

But nevertheless, the conditions within this ocean of flame were frightful. One had a feeling of being suffocated in the intense heat.

While I stayed in the prison at DARMSTADT, my apartment in HANAU was destroyed during an air attack. Around the same time, my eldest son,

who was then attending the military college at WARTHELAGER as a prospective officer candidate, was crossed off the list and eliminated by order of the HIGH-COMMAND of the ARMED-FORCES (KEITEL) for allegedly being politically unreliable, and transferred for service to a replacement training unit. This order saved the boy's life; only a few days after his transfer, that particular college was annihilated by Russian forces.

On 18 January 1945, exactly 24 weeks after my arrival in the prison, I was informed of my transfer to the detention fortress of KUESTRIN, the move being scheduled for the same day. The shadow of KATTE rose threateningly in my mind. But I have never lost faith in the Lord; He would protect me equally in KUESTRIN as He had done anywhere. And that proved to be the case. Accompanied by two GESTAPO officials, I arrived at the detention fortress of KUESTRIN in the evening of 19 January 1945, where the C.O. of the fortress, Dr. LEUSSING, MAJOR in the RESERVES received me in a most chivalrous and accommodating manner, and assigned me to a well-furnished and large room. After such a prolonged stay in prison in a single cell I felt now as if I had come into Heaven.

The High Command of the ARMED FORCES (O.K.W.) had notified the FORTRESS Command of KUESTRIN of my transfer with the following order:

COPY

S e c r e t O r d e r

High Command of the ARMY Office of the "Heerespersonalamt"

O.U., 20 December 1944

No. 15465/44 - g - Ag. F 2/Bechtatz. (2)

To the Commanding Officer of the Kuestrin-FORTRESS,

Re: Theodore GROPPE, Lt. GEN. A.D. - born: 16 August 1882

Lt. GEN. A.D. Theodore GROPPE has been detained by order of the Reichsfuehrer -SS- at the fortress of GERMERSHEIM since the middle of August 1944, now at KUESTRIN.

He is to be treated as prisoner under investigation (before trial).

By order:

(signed) MEISEL

To this typewritten order, GENERAL MEISEL had added the following instruction with indelible pencil: "Does not deserve good treatment in consideration of circumstances of the case."

Giving such an instruction in the THIRD Reich, required no further comment on the meaning! The above-named GENERAL MEISEL was the same one who with GENERAL BURGDORF had assassinated FIELDMARSHAL ROMMEL on the order of HITLER; personally I was not acquainted with him. He signed: "i.A.," i.e. "in Auftrag" or: by order; - Who were those who had ordered him? I assume they were the KEITEL brothers.

The instrument but seems to confirm that my long detention in the DARMSTADT prison was the outcome of a special order of HITLER's, which had been kept secret by him from the Office of the HIGH-COMMAND of the ARMED FORCES.

In fairness to the chivalrous and discreet Commander of the detention fortress KUESTRIN, I have to say that, contrary to his orders, I was never treated discriminately as a prisoner under investigation, but like any of the other gentlemen that were held in KUESTRIN as honorable detainees, and I was always treated in a dignified and considerate manner.

His job as commander was a very difficult one. His pay-clerk RANF, in civilian life an elementary school teacher and propaganda orator for a district, and one non-commissioned officer, SILBERMEIER by name, were confirmed PARTY spies and made no bones about telling the Commander frankly that all of us should be strung up on the gallows, and watching suspiciously all measures taken by him. RANF bragged that he had been the one being responsible for the shooting of Lt. GEN. Count SPONECK in CERMERSHEIM fortress after the 20 July 1944 affair. But MAJOR LEUSSING was a master at preserving face before the PARTY and simultaneously looking out decidedly for our interests too. His thoughts and opinions were wholly in line with ours, and during hours, where our lives were at stake, he proved it by his courageous and wise actions. For this we will never be able to thank him in full.

The inmates of the detention fortress were predominantly "honorable

detainees" which again were divided in two groups:

- a) Persons implicated by kinship, i.e., members of the ARMY whose nearest relatives were in certain cases under strong suspicion, or else had been executed for participation in the conspiracy of 20 July 1944. They were as follows:

Major Gen. von STUELPMAGEL, cousin of General von Stuelpnagel, who was hanged.

Lt. Col. FELLGIEBEL, brother of the General of like name, who was hanged.

Lt. Col. von KLUGE, son of the Fieldmarshal v.K., who was poisoned.

Superior-Judge-advocate KAISER, brother of the executed (by hanging) high school professor KAISER.

Major HOEPNER, son of Col. Gen. HOEPNER, executed by hanging.

Major von HASSEL, son of Ambassador von HASSEL, executed by hanging.

Capt. PAULUS, son of the Fieldmarshal PAULUS, (STALINGRAD).

Lt. in the ARMY RESERVE. WIRMER, Asst. Judge, brother of attorney-at-law WIRMER, executed by hanging.

- b) Members of the ARMY, who had shown a highly suspicious attitude on the 20 July 1944 occurrence, in the opinion of the GESTAPO, were:

GEN. of ARMORED-FORCES, SCHAAL, C.O. of BOHEMIA and MORAVIA Districts.

GEN. of ARMORED-FORCES, BARON von ESSBECK, Deputy-Commanding General in VIENNA.

Lt. GEN. SINZINGER, Commanding Officer in VIENNA.

Lt. GEN. Dr. SPAIDEL, Chief of Staff with Fieldmarshal ROMMEL.

Major-General von PFUELSTEIN, Commanding Officer of a Division; on his own repeated urgent requests he was later reinstated again with the rank of Major in the -SS-.

Maj.-Gen. RIEGER, Mil. Commander in FRANKFURT/MAIN.

Maj.-Gen. von HOLWEDE, Mil. Commander in WEFURT.

c) Further

Lt. Gen. a.D. GROPPE, former C.O. of 214 Inf. Div. as prisoner under investigation.

Lt. Gen. a.D. of the ROYAL NETHERLANDS ARMY, van ROËLL, former C.O. of the DUTCH-ARMY, sentenced to death, but execution deferred by order of HITLER.

Dr. SOLEM and RENDSDAHL, two Norwegians, sentenced to death but sentence commuted to life imprisonment in a fortress.

Col. BALLEI, Slovakian Mil. Attache¹ in BERLIN, as prisoner under investigation.

Thanks to the obliging attitude of Major LEUSSING, all of us had fair liberty of movement within the walls of the fortress, took our meals together in the Casino mess hall and could visit each other at any time in

our rooms. These latter were well furnished, but very cold. The large rooms of the castle barracks could not be heated comfortably with the small amount of coal placed at our disposal.

In spite of the laughably inaccurate and highly diluted reports issued by the O.K.W., it was a fact that the Russians were coming nearer every day. In the night of 30 January 1945 we left our fortress prison in open motor trucks in bitter cold, for WITTENBERGE o/KIBE, arriving there the following morning in a frozen-stiff condition. We found here accommodations in the hotel "GOLDEN EAGLE" from which we were permitted to take daily walks. Our hasty escape from KUESTRIN was made not one instant too early. Already the next day at noon, Russian armored cars appeared and penetrated into the town.

On 24 February 1945, - the Russians approached closer again - we were placed into a special R.R. car and traveled by the railroad (without having any particular destination) for four days all over the country in search of a safe place of refuge; always keeping in mind to avoid any -SS- units and with the intention of getting closer to the ARMIES of the Allied Forces which were then approaching from the West.

Once during our trip the train was attacked by the enemy air force and our locomotive was destroyed; two of the train passengers got killed and eight were wounded. Luckily, our group emerged without a scratch. On 28 February 1945 we finally arrived at LUDWIGSBURG, finding accommodations in the "BAHN HOTEL," staying there until 15 March 1945. Here I was

able to celebrate a short-lived reunion with my wife and youngest son who had succeeded, despite all difficulties, in reaching the town.

The prison institution was shifted on 15 March 1945 to OBERSTENFELDE, county of HEILBRONN. Here the anti-Nazi and honest population improved our scanty menu by voluntary gifts - contributions of food for our maintenance. Dislodged from there by some HIGH-COMMAND-ARMY-STAFF, we proceeded to GOENNINGEN, county of REUTLINGEN, arriving there 1 April 1945. Here we got information on 15 April 1945 of an order issued by Himmler on the previous day that all of us should be done away with. Paymaster RANF tried very hard to set the GESTAPO at TUEBINGEN on our track, but in vain. That same night we escaped under the leadership of our Commander to GAMMERDINGEN and from there to PFULLENDORF in search for a refuge and finally, traveling at night in an open motor truck and in teeming rain after a wild chase and an eight hour ride, arrived in the "HERZBERG" monastery near IMMENSTADT on ALPSEE on 22 April at 0400 hours. Here, Friar KRUCK of the PALLOTINE order received our group with sincere hospitality. We would find a little rest now, so we thought, after all the hardship, and could dry our wet clothing. On the road, leading along the foot of the hill on which the monastery was situated, one could observe during the following days retreating troops in dissolution, marching in an easterly direction. One had a sure feeling the Allies could not be very far distant now.

Major LEUSSING in consequence thereof decided to dissolve the detention prison on 23 April 1945; he gave written certificates to each of us stating that he had set us free. Our guards had dressed in mufti and they also were released. Lt. Gen. SINZINGER, an Austrian, left us, trying to make his way to his home in Austria. Most of the members of the Staff, among these Paymaster RANF and non-commissioned officer SILBERMAIER, took leave. Only a few decent fellows, having their families in the Western area, stayed with us.

A pity it was we should not enjoy very long our well-deserved rest in safety. On 25 April 1945, about 2300 hours, -SS-, armed to the teeth, penetrated into the monastery, which they had surrounded previously under cover of darkness in order to get at and do away with us. The situation was mighty critical, but Major LEUSSING mastered it. In a jiffy he donned his uniform and pointed out to the leader of the band, HIMMLER had sent special orders to him through an air-force officer holding him (LEUSSING) strictly responsible for the safety of the officers under detention. The latter were all higher General Staff officers, holding the highest decorations received for meritorious services, whom the Reichsfuehrer -SS- was retaining for a special task.

The positive inflexible attitude of Major LEUSSING imposed upon the ignorant leader of the -SS-. The latter apologized by saying he had been wrongly informed and withdrew with his men. All of us were greatly relieved thereupon.

But it seemed quite evident they would come back again after finding out they had been deceived. Early in the morning 26 April 1945 our host Friar PETER KRUCK went on our behalf to an out-of-the-way village called URNAU looking for other billets. Only the mayor of the village, RIST, and the Catholic priest Monsignore SCHMIEDER were let in on the secret about our identity. For all the other inhabitants of the village, 260 altogether, we posed as simple evacuated refugees. These two brave men knew quite well that it was a gamble, with our lives at stake, if the -SS- would trace us to the village, but, without a moment's hesitation they declared their willingness to give us shelter. So we made our departure from HERZBERG monastery on 26 April 1945. Nobody was informed about our destination. Under cover of darkness we stopped just outside of URNAU village and arrived singly and in small groups at our prearranged assigned billets. Instructions were issued to everyone, nobody was to leave his billet or house until further notice. In great tension, 27 and 28 April passed by; small -SS- bands showed up in the village and its environs; but our group remained undetected.

In the meantime, just the thing we had feared and expected in the monastery HERZBERG, did happen. On 27 April 1945 the -SS- band appeared again. But the birds they were looking for and which they wanted to catch, had disappeared. Peter KRUCK could not be found, and the remaining inmates of the monastery could give assurances to the best of their knowledge and belief, of not having the faintest knowledge of our whereabouts.

Cursing wickedly, the -SS- band withdrew again.

On the following day, Paymaster RANF appeared again at the monastery and "confided" to Friar Peter KRUCK: -"a good Catholic in FRIEDRICHSHAFEN had heard the -SS- were looking for us and wanted to kill us!"- He (KRUCK) should tell him where we were in order to be able to give warnings to our group. Peter KRUCK professed he could not tell him.

Lt. Gen. van ROELL and two younger gentlemen and myself had been assigned billets in the R. C. Rectory and we received touching attention. Many stories of perpetrated atrocities by roaming bands of the -SS- penetrated into our hide-out, said to have been committed chiefly on lonely situated farm houses. What would happen to the staunch inhabitants of this village if, after all, the -SS- would discover us here?

Suddenly, on 29 April 1945, a Sunday morning, as we were just having our breakfast, the noise of motors could be heard and soon thereafter two FRENCH ARMORED TANKS stopped right in front of the Rectory. Thank the Lord, now we were saved! 72 years old General van ROELL who, by the way, was president of the DUTCH-FRENCH-Alliance and GRAND-KNIGHT of the LEGION of HONOR, hurried toward the leader of the reconnaissance detachment, Capt. de BONIE, like a youth and described our plight to him. After Capt. de BONIE had greeted us, he soon drove to SIGMARINGEN, the H.Q. of the C. GENERAL of the FRENCH-IX ARMY, taking General van ROELL and three other foreign gentlemen with him.

Gen. BETHOUART, C. O. of the FRENCH I ARMY paid us a visit on the following forenoon, congratulating us on our liberation and promising the

protection of the FRENCH MILITARY AUTHORITIES. With full liberty of movement we were to remain in URNAU until the necessary interrogations had been completed and the required travel permits for entering the American and British zones, respectively, had been granted by the military authorities. Besides, General BETHOUART had already been informed about our group by General van Roell.

Because of a change in the FRENCH MILITARY COMMAND the interrogation of our group proceeded very slowly and it produced a severe psychological stress on our minds. It was a long time since we had news of any kind from our nearest relatives and the fear the Nazis might have done something to them, was in our minds. But late in June, this anxiety was removed from my mind when all of a sudden my daughter appeared in URNAU for a visit. She had traveled from FRANKFURT/MAIN, where she attended lectures, in search for the burial place of her father, because she had assumed that, after the HIMMLER order, dated as of 14 April 1945, the killing of her father might have occurred and that such an event had to be taken into account. Thanks to the chivalrous support of the FRENCH authorities, she succeeded after a long search in finding me here.

Early in August 1945, the FRENCH WAR OFFICE issued orders granting our final liberation; the travel permits for entering the American and British zones respectively, were granted by the occupation authorities in the middle of October. Meanwhile we enjoyed the unlimited hospitality of the honest inhabitants of URNAU, knowing now our actual identity ever since the arrival of the FRENCH FORCES. A sincere friendship had

developed between the gallant inhabitants and ourselves and we helped them in the harvesting operations to the best of our ability.

The exemplary attitude of the deeply religious people of URNAU and their disinclination for the Nazis were fully acknowledged by the FRENCH military authorities. Upon the recommendation of General de MONTSABERT, the URNAU community was exempted from all requisitioning measures and of any and all billeting in view of, and with special reference to, the faithful services rendered to our group.

Our upright commander (Major LEUBING), not being in a position to claim the privileges of a political prisoner, was set free immediately in recognition of his highly commendable attitude. My eldest son, a prisoner of war in FRENCH hands, was also set free by the chivalrous C. O. of the FRENCH occupation troops, Gen. de MONTSABERT, as was said, in recognition of the attitude of his father.

The day of our leave taking and departure from the honest inhabitants of URNAU drew near. We were to see our own relatives soon. Great as our joy was to see our own again, so painful was it for us all to say goodbye to our friends here. Every single one of the villagers had done one or another service for us, and this was particularly true of the dignified local priest Monseigneur SCHNIEDER and Major RIST.

Automobile transportation to the border of their occupation zone was made available to us by FRENCH military authorities in a most obliging manner. I traveled to REUTLINGEN on 25 October 1945 and I had excellent billeting accommodation assigned to me by the FRENCH local

military Commander. After an absence of 14½ months, I arrived in HANAU by train on the evening of 27 October, returning again to my family.

Much to my regret, information reached me too late, i. e. only after my arrival in HANAU, which showed that the American Mil. Government had even sent a car all the way down to URNAU in order to provide transportation from there direct to my home in HANAU.

The latter town had since been reduced to a pile of ruins and debris. In ruins, too, we see the GERMAN REICH. It was bound to take such a turn; our Lord cannot be mocked unpunished. Our poor deluded people took the wrong road by forsaking the Lord; it was paying homage to a false idol. May the German people draw the consequences and learn a lesson from this terrible fate that now justly has come down upon it. If it does that, there is hope that it will again be a people with truly Christian tendencies and the Lord will show mercy on the now crushed FATHERLAND and reinstate it in the position it was in during former days: a HOLY GERMAN EMPIRE.

I cannot terminate this report without my heartfelt thanks to all those who have shown me their friendship in all the bitter years of Nazi domination.

My sincerest thanks go to our all-merciful Lord, whose fatherly hands have conducted me through all the numerous hazards in merciful guidance.

(signed) GROPF

